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DRINKING WATER SUPPLY AND
SANITATION DECADE

Progress made in providing safe water supply and sanitation for all during the first half of the 1990s

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Scope of the report

1. The previous report of the Secretary-General (A/45/327), which was submitted to the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session, in 1990, outlined the progress achieved in providing safe water and suitable sanitation worldwide during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, 1981-1990. It was indicated at that time that the rate of progress achieved during the Decade would be insufficient to reach the ultimate objective of services for all by the end of the century.

2. The General Assembly, in resolution 45/181 of 21 December 1990, expressed deep concern that, "notwithstanding the achievements attained during the Decade, the current rate of progress remains slow and would leave a very significant number of poor people in urban and rural areas without suitable services in water and sanitation by the year 2000". The General Assembly, in that resolution, also addressed a number of recommendations to Governments and to the international community in order to intensify efforts aimed at achieving the ultimate objectives of the Decade.

3. In the same resolution, the Assembly decided to review, at its fiftieth session, through the Economic and Social Council, the progress made during the first half of the 1990s. Pursuant to that resolution, the present report evaluates the progress made in attaining the ultimate goal of providing safe water supply and sanitation for all and provides proposals for further action.

B. Issues concerning the information base

4. The previous report of the Secretary-General stated that, in spite of improvements in the level and quality of data, the lack of adequate information on water supply and sanitation at the national level was a serious constraint to sector planning and management. Although improvements in this regard have continued to take place, in many cases the data are still of insufficient quality for the purpose of national evaluation and planning and accurate international monitoring.

5. The quantitative comparative analysis of service coverage is based on 1990 data provided by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the basis of the ongoing monitoring programme at that time and on information provided by Governments through the WHO/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme from 1992 to 1994. Population data are based on the United Nations publication World Population Prospects: The 1994 Revision. No information was available from the Joint Monitoring Programme concerning the situation in the countries with economies in transition.

6. In terms of the current report, as in the past, standards concerning what constitutes safe water supply and suitable sanitation services are determined by the reporting countries. As a general rule, reporting countries are adopting a more restrictive definition than they had in the past. This appears to have

been particularly the case with regard to sanitation in some countries in Asia with large populations. While necessary in terms of providing a more realistic picture of water supply and sanitation coverage, such changes in definition make it difficult to establish benchmarks for trend analyses. As a result of improvements in the reliability of data and of the changes in definition, the revised 1990 coverage figures included in the present report differ, substantially in some cases, from those contained in the report submitted to the General Assembly in 1990. Furthermore, a comparison with the 1980 data provided in that report would not be appropriate. Given the changes in definition of what constitutes safe water supply and suitable sanitation services, the levels of services reported in the 1990 report are likely to overestimate the situation prevailing at that time.

7. To the extent that the coverage data provided by Governments are accurate, it is considered that the samples for Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean are representative of the current situation in those regions. Population samples ranged from 68 per cent of the total population in Africa, to 90 per cent in Asia and the Pacific. In the case of Western Asia, responses by Governments to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme were insufficient to make any inferences. The 1994 data provided for this region were generated by WHO on the basis of trend estimates based on reports from earlier years. That data, therefore, should be considered as being of a more speculative nature, but probably indicative of current levels of coverage.

8. The coverage figures contained in the present report aim at presenting a sense of what has taken place since 1990 and of the likely consequences of such trends to the end of the century. It is felt that the information provided in the report offers a suitable order of magnitude regarding progress achieved and problems to be faced.

9. Coverage data in the present report refer to service facilities available to urban and rural populations. No reference is made concerning the effective use of services or the frequency and duration of breakdowns in services as no data are available on these issues. Thus, no inferences are made regarding the health impacts of these two questions.

II. SERVICE COVERAGE

10. Table 1 describes the water supply and sanitation service coverage situation for 1990 and 1994 in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Western Asia, as well as the level of services that would be achieved by the year 2000 were the 1990-1994 trend in service delivery to continue. Table 2 shows the rate of progress achieved between 1990 and 1994 and the progress required by the year 2000 either to maintain the current number of people without services or to achieve full coverage. Approximately 3.27 billion people had access to safe water supply in 1994, and 1.51 billion had access to suitable sanitation. Some 1.11 billion lacked access to safe water and 2.87 billion lacked access to sanitation. An additional 783 million people were provided with access to safe water during the four-year period and the total number of people without clean water decreased by 472 million. No reliable global inferences are possible concerning increases in sanitation services over

Table 1 Waster supply and sanitation coverage by region, 1990-1994, and coverage for 2000 at current rates of progress

(Population in millions)

	1990				1994				2000			
Region/sector	Population	% coverage	No. served	No. unserved	Population	% coverage	No. served	No. unserved	Population	% coverage	No. served	No. unserved
Africa												
Urban water	201	67	135	66	239	64	153	85	310	58	181	129
Rural water	432	35	153	279	468	37	173	295	521	39	203	318
Urban sanitation	201	65	130	71	239	55	131	107	310	43	133	177
Rural sanitation	432	23	99	333	468	24	112	355	521	25	132	389
Latin America and the Caribbean												
Urban water	314	90	282	32	348	88	306	42	401	85	342	58
Rural water	126	51	64	61	125	56	70	55	123	64	78	45
Urban sanitation	314	83	262	52	348	73	254	94	401	60	242	159
Rural sanitation	126	33	42	84	125	34	42	82	123	35	43	79
Asia and the Pacific												
Urban water	829	83	689	140	955	84	805	149	1 178	83	981	197
Rural water	2 097	53	1 108	989	2 167	78	1 690	477	2 250	100	2 250	0
Urban sanitation	829	62	513	316	955	61	584	371	1 178	59	689	489
Rural sanitation	2 097	18	379	1 718	2 167	15	332	1 834	2 250	12	262	1 988
Western Asia												
Urban water	45	86	39	6	52	98	51	1	65	100	65	0
Rural water	27	62	17	10	29	69	20	9	32	77	25	8
Urban sanitation	45	70	31	14	52	70	36	16	65	66	43	22
Rural sanitation	27	60	16	11	29	64	19	10	32	69	22	10
Global totals												
Urban water	1 389	82	1 144	245	1 593	83	1 316	277	1 955	80	1 570	386
Rural water	2 681	50	1 342	1 339	2 788	70	1 953	835	2 926	87	2 596	370
Urban sanitation	1 389	67	937	452	1 593	63	1 006	588	1 955	57	1 109	846
Rural sanitation	2 681	20	536	2 145	2 788	18	506	2 282	2 926	16	459	2 467

Table 2. Progress achieved during the period 1990-1994 and progress needed for full coverage by 2000

	Increases in coverage 1990-1994 (Million/year)	Increases in coverage (Percentage)	Increases in unserved (Percentage)	Increases needed by 2000 to maintain the 1994 number unserved (Million/year)	Increases needed by 2000 for full coverage (Million/year)
Africa					
Urban water	4.64	14	29	12.00	26.11
Rural water	5.06	13	6	8.83	58.06
Urban sanitation	0.37	1	51	12.00	29.82
Rural sanitation	3.30	13	7	9.00	68.20
Latin America and the Caribbean					
Urban water	6.12	9	29	8.83	15.83
Rural water	1.35	8	-10	0	8.79
Urban sanitation	-	-	-	8.83	24.54
Rural sanitation	0.12	1	-2	0	13.36
Asia and the Pacific					
Urban water	29.19	17	6	37.33	62.09
Rural water	145.48	53	-52	13.83	93.35
Urban sanitation	17.59	14	18	37.17	99.05
Rural sanitation	-	-	-	14.00	319.61
Western Asia					
Urban water	3.01	31	-84	2.16	2.34
Rural water	0.80	19	-10	0.50	2.01
Urban sanitation	1.20	15	14	2.83	3.76
Rural sanitation	0.62	16	-3	0.50	2.24
Global totals					
Urban water	42.96	15	13	60.67	106.38
Rural water	152.69	46	-38	23.83	162.22
Urban sanitation	-	-	-	60.67	158.16
Rural sanitation	-	-	-	23.83	403.41

Note: A hyphen (-) indicates a lack of comparability in data owing to changes in definition regarding suitability of services.

the period as a result of the use of significantly more stringent criteria through time regarding what constitutes safe sanitation.

11. To the extent that any comparison with the 1980-1990 trends contained in the previous report is possible, given the difficulties mentioned earlier, it would appear that the annual rates of increases in water supply over the past four years constitute an acceleration of the pace witnessed during the previous decade.

A. The urban setting

12. The challenge of providing full water supply and sanitation coverage to the urban areas of developing countries remains daunting, especially because of high rates of population growth and urbanization. For developing countries, the number of urban dwellers with safe water stands at 1.32 billion. Although some 172 million people were provided with safe water between 1990 and 1994, the number of urban dwellers without access to such services may have increased by 32 million. In relative terms, the percentage of people with safe water supply has increased slightly. With regard to sanitation, the number of urban dwellers currently having access to suitable services is estimated at 1 billion people, leaving some 588 million without such services.

13. In the face of an annual rate of urban population growth for the period 1990-1995 estimated at 4.38 per cent, the addition of 19 million people provided with safe drinking water in Africa resulted in a decrease in the percentage of the population with access to clean water relative to the total urban population. The total number of urban dwellers without access to safe water also increased by about 19 million. In the developing countries of Asia and the Pacific, where the average annual rate of urban population increase for 1990-1995 is estimated at 3.71 per cent, 117 million more people gained access to safe water supplies. Nevertheless, the total number of urban dwellers without safe water increased by 9 million. In relative terms, the percentage of urban coverage remained virtually unchanged. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where the average annual rate of urban population growth is estimated at 2.6 per cent, the region may barely have been able to keep up with urbanization. The actual gain in the number of people having received access to safe water is likely to be higher than estimated as a result of changes in definition. Preliminary estimates for Western Asia indicate major progress having been made in the provision of services to a point of near full coverage.

14. The neglect of urban sanitation has been particularly critical in Africa, where only an additional 1 million people are reported to have gained access to safe sanitation. The ranks of those without such services swelled by as many as 36 million. Relative coverage dropped from 65 per cent to 55 per cent. In Asia and the Pacific, the addition of some 70 million people to the urban population with access to suitable sanitation was accompanied by an increase of some 55 million without access to such services. Relative coverage remained essentially static. In Western Asia, some 2 million people may have been added to those with such facilities, in spite of the addition of 5 million to the population with access to services. In Latin America, some 94 million people are reported to lack suitable sanitation. In all four regions, the proportion

of people with access to safe sanitation remains considerably lower than in the case of water supply.

B. The rural setting

15. Progress with regard to the provision of clean water to rural areas has been significant. About 611 million people have been added to the ranks of those having access to safe water. The number of people without services has decreased by 504 million. By contrast, rural sanitation has been the source of total neglect. Taking into account the statistical differences attributable to shifts in criteria regarding what constitutes suitable sanitation facilities, it is likely that little, if any, change has taken place in the levels of coverage in developing countries as a whole.

16. Progress in the provision of safe water supply to rural areas has been particularly significant in Asia and the Pacific, where an additional 582 million people are reported to have received access to safe water, reducing the number of people unserved by 513 million. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of people without safe water decreased by 6 million. In Western Asia, the addition of 3 million people to those gaining access to safe water led to a decrease of 1 million in the number of inhabitants without suitable services. An additional 20 million people received access to safe water in the rural areas of Africa. However, given the high rate of population growth, estimated at 2.03 per cent yearly, between 1990 and 1995, the total number without safe water increased by 16 million.

17. With the apparent exception of Western Asia, the levels of sanitation services to rural areas remain dismally low. Africa reports some progress, having increased by 23 million the number of people with access. Nevertheless, those without services increased by 23 million. No gains were made in Latin America. The apparent decrease in coverage for Asia and the Pacific is due to a reported drastic change in criteria in the larger countries of the region.

C. Prospects to the end of the century

18. Except for Western Asia, where the current rate of increase in coverage, if continued, would provide water supply to all urban dwellers by the year 2000, a continuation of the trend in the provision of services witnessed between 1990 and 1994 would be insufficient to prevent an increase in the number of people not having access to safe water, much less in achieving full coverage by the year 2000. In the case of Africa, the rate of service increase would need to be more than twice the current rate in order to keep pace with urban growth. More than a fivefold increase would be required to achieve full coverage. In Latin America, the rate of increase may need to be as much as 2.6 times higher in order to achieve full coverage by 2000, and 2.12 times higher in the case of Asia and the Pacific.

19. Within a longer time-frame, the continuation of the current rate of progress in Latin America and the Caribbean would yield full coverage by the

year 2000. However, Africa would need to treble its current rate and Asia and the Pacific would require a twofold increase.

20. The situation concerning urban sanitation gives cause for concern and, in the case of Africa, for outright alarm. The current rate of service increases in all regions is insufficient to prevent an increase in the number of dwellers without access to at least minimum standards of sanitation in all regions. Both Asia and the Pacific and Western Asia need to more than double their current rates of service increases in order to maintain the current levels of unserved. A rate of increase nearly 33 times higher will be required in the African region to achieve this objective.

21. In Asia and the Pacific, service coverage would need to be provided to an additional 99 million people per year in order to achieve full coverage by the year 2000, representing an increase as much as 5.6 times the current rate. A fourfold increase would be needed to achieve the same objective by 2020. Latin America and the Caribbean would need to add some 24.5 million people per year, and a fourfold increase would be required for Western Asia to achieve full coverage. In Africa, the rate of expansion would need to be 80.6 times higher to the end of the century. The region would need to provide services to an additional 29.8 million people per year.

22. To achieve full coverage by 2020, Asia and the Pacific would require a rate of progress more than three times higher than the current rate, and Africa 46 times higher. The Latin American and Caribbean region would need to add some 9.9 million people per year to those served in order to achieve full coverage.

23. Under the current criteria regarding suitability in terms of quality and distance to water supply sources, a continuation of the rate of progress that has been reported to have taken place in the provision of safe water to the rural populations of Asia and the Pacific would yield full coverage in the region before the end of the century. This is not the case for any of the other regions. In Africa, a continuation of the current pace of providing safe water to rural dwellers would be insufficient to maintain the number of unserved people at the 1994 level. An increase of 58 million people per year would be required in order to supply every person with safe water. This would require nearly a twelvefold increase in the current rate of progress.

24. With a longer-term objective of providing full service coverage by the year 2020, the region would need to provide safe water to an additional 19 million people per year. The rate of increase would need to be 6.5 times higher in Latin America and the Caribbean, where nearly 9 million people per year would need to be added to those having access to safe water. In spite of the projected decrease in rural population, the current rate of expansion in services would be insufficient to achieve full coverage by 2020. The rate of progress in Western Asia would need to be 2.6 times the current rate in order to achieve full service coverage by the end of this decade.

25. In view of the stagnation in providing sanitation services to the rural population, a solution to the problem is unlikely to be at hand in the near future. In Africa, a rate of progress nearly three times higher than the current trend would be required simply to keep pace with increases in the rural

population. A rate of progress nearly 21 times higher than the current one would be required to achieve full service coverage by the end of the century. Given the projected rate of growth in population, an expansion in the time-horizon to the year 2020 would not make the solution any easier. Nearly a fourfold increase in the current rate would be needed in Western Asia. The Latin American and Caribbean region would need to provide sanitation to 13.4 million rural dwellers each year to the end of this century. Asia and the Pacific would have to provide sanitation to an additional 320 million rural dwellers per year to achieve full coverage by the year 2000. An increase of 75.5 million per year would achieve this objective by 2020.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

26. The objective of providing water supply and sanitation services to all is inextricably linked to poverty in peri-urban and rural areas. Solutions to the problem of reaching the millions of people worldwide who lack suitable facilities will only be found within a framework of poverty alleviation.

27. Despite all the calls to action, dating back to the Mar del Plata Action Plan, 1/ adopted by the United Nations Water Conference in 1977, the situation concerning urban water supply and sanitation so far has followed a steady path of deterioration. The situation is particularly alarming with regard to neglect of sanitation and inadequate attention to pollution from urban waste.

28. The problem of providing services to rural areas is closely related to the fact that they account for a large proportion of people living at or below the absolute level of poverty. It is not surprising, therefore, that, with the exception of Asia and the Pacific, little, if any, progress has been achieved in providing safe water to the unserved and that sanitation has received a much lower priority than water supply.

29. Significant progress has been made with regard to conceptual approaches to the financing, provision and operation and maintenance of services, particularly with regard to the need for a devolution of responsibility to the members of the community for these activities. The results of this evolution in conceptual approaches are increasingly being applied successfully in many developing countries. Still, the impact of these new approaches is likely to remain limited unless water resources in general and rural water supply and sanitation in particular are considered as agents of development, employment and income-generation in rural areas.

30. It is clear that no real solution to the problem of water supply and sanitation will be at hand without very significant infusions of funding into the sector several times larger than the funding devoted at present, even with the utilization of low-cost appropriate technologies. In the case of urban water supply, the problem is compounded by the need for considerable additional capital investments in infrastructure and increasing costs in the light of a growing demand for water from rapidly expanding cities.

31. Traditionally, the delivery of water supply and sewerage systems has been provided through public utilities financed and heavily subsidized through the

public sector. A World Bank report 2/ notes that public financing for the water and sanitation sector as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) rose considerably between 1960 and 1980, and remained virtually constant during the 1980s, in spite of a decline in overall public investment as a proportion of GDP. It has now become increasingly evident that this pattern alone cannot generate the necessary funding to achieve full service coverage even at the most basic levels. Ultimately, the solution will depend on people's ability to pay for services and on the ability of utilities, whether public or private, to provide these services in an efficient and environmentally sustainable manner.

32. The same World Bank report states that the performance and sustainability of water and sanitation services depend not only on the level of financing for these services but also on the sources of such financing. Experience shows unequivocally that services are efficient and accountable to the degree that users are closely involved in providing financing for them. 3/

33. Any pricing policy aimed at cost recovery must take into account the ability of the poor in urban and rural areas to pay for the provision of services. Income transfers in the form of subsidies or grants are necessary to the extent that the poor in these areas are unable to pay for services at basic quality standards. Such transfers, however, should not be carried out at the expense of the financial autonomy and accountability of public or private utilities that provide services. At the same time, it is important to note that, as pointed out in the World Bank report, many people in urban and rural areas are paying higher prices for water through services provided by the informal sector than they would through well-organized public or private utilities within the formal sector. The willingness of the poor to pay is closely related to the nature of the services being provided to them. Experience has demonstrated that in many cases the members of poor communities will be more willing to pay for services of higher quality than they would for the most basic ones. The involvement of communities in the design of delivery systems has to be considered as an important component in efforts to generate financial resources for the sector.

34. There is now a growing body of experience showing the important role that the private sector can play in the generation of financial resources and in the delivery of services. There is also a growing understanding of the fact that peri-urban and rural communities can play an important role in the generation of financial resources and in the operation and management of local water supply and sanitation systems.

35. A massive infusion of funding is particularly needed with regard to the provision of sanitation in urban and rural areas and for the treatment of effluents polluting river and groundwater basins. Examples already abound regarding the impact of neglected sanitation on the squalor and diseases in many urban centres and rural communities. The discharge of untreated sewage constitutes a very serious threat to the long-term sustainable development of many river and groundwater basins. Unless urgent and effective action is taken, the neglect of sanitation and waste-water treatment may lead to disastrous health and environmental consequences, with global implications.

36. The effective demand for sanitation services has lagged behind the demand for water supply as the need for sanitation services to the peri-urban and rural poor is not perceived as having the immediate life-or-death urgency of water. Under such conditions, urgent attention needs to be given to public hygiene education, to the design of systems that find widespread public acceptance in terms of convenience and cost, to the generation of financial resources and to the formulation of effective tariff policies for sewerage and waste-water treatment facilities.

37. However, increase in the availability of financial resources alone would not be a sufficient condition for progress. The absorptive capacity of institutions dealing with water supply and sanitation at all levels of government and that of communities generally remains low. The need for capacity-building is also urgent.

38. A Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation was convened in March 1994 by the Government of the Netherlands in order to provide input to the second session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in its review of chapter 18 of Agenda 21 (Protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources: application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources). 4/ The Conference issued a set of proposals, contained in its Action Programme (see E/CN.17/1994/12), which were presented to and endorsed by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its second session.

39. This Action Programme represents the latest stage in the evolution of concepts since the United Nations Water Conference in 1977, the Global Consultation on Safe Water and Sanitation for the 1990s, held in New Delhi in 1990 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. During this 18-year period, new concepts have been accepted concerning stakeholder participation, the roles of Governments at various levels and the private sector, and the mobilization of financial resources.

40. The question of reforms in the management of water resources is one of the fundamental issues addressed in the recommendations contained in chapter 18 of Agenda 21. The chapter calls for a holistic approach to the management of freshwater as a finite and vulnerable resource and for the management of water at the lowest appropriate level.

41. Given the increasing scarcity of water resources relative to its demand for various uses, the Ministerial Conference reiterated the need for dealing with drinking water supply and sanitation within the context of a holistic management of freshwater. The Conference, inter alia, recommended that Governments should undertake a water resources assessment in order to produce an inventory of the current situation and to identify problems and constraints in providing water supply and environmental sanitation services. The Conference also called on Governments to develop, review or revise, in the context of a national sustainable development strategy consistent with Agenda 21, measures for water resources management, including drinking water and environmental sanitation, and to develop, review or revise by 1997 and implement measures aimed at achieving a rational and effective provision and use of drinking water and environmental sanitation.

42. The report of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its second session, concerning the implementation of the recommendations contained in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 (E/CN.17/1994/4), indicated that progress towards the integrated management of water resources had been slow. The fact that in many countries data concerning the availability of water supply and sanitation services remain spotty and unreliable confirms the view that, so far, on the whole, efforts have been insufficient to carry out the above-stated recommendations of the Conference.

43. Governments need to initiate or accelerate their efforts towards the management of water resources, the monitoring of water and sanitation services and the formulation of policies aimed at providing full coverage. In view of the much lower levels in service coverage achieved in rural areas, a review of measures aimed at achieving full coverage would require an examination of priorities between the urban and rural sectors and between the delivery of water and the provision of sanitation facilities.

44. In view of the existing situation concerning the management and development of water resources in general and drinking water supply and sanitation in particular, Governments that have not done so need to proceed as rapidly as possible with their assessment of their situation, and a review of policies along the lines recommended in chapter 18 of Agenda 21 and in the Action Programme of the Ministerial Conference.

45. The effective involvement of urban and rural communities in policy formulation and the planning, development and management of water supply and sanitation facilities is essential. Women play an important role in water resources management and in the operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation facilities in their communities. The recognition of the importance of stakeholder participation has been a major evolution away from centralized systems since the United Nations Water Conference in 1977 and one of the major lessons learned during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

46. The Action Programme of the Ministerial Conference stresses the need for a partnership approach to water resources development in general and drinking water supply and environmental sanitation in particular. The Conference drew attention to the need for a dialogue about the attitudes and needs of people in rural and urban communities, and on what they can manage, maintain and pay for. Among the recommendations for action made to Governments in this regard, the Ministers called for the provision of training programmes according to regulated standards for all levels of personnel responsible for management of drinking water, sanitation and waste-water treatment in all relevant authorities, reflecting new approaches and principles. They agreed that policy makers, owners, contractors and operators of water supply and environmental sanitation systems need to be encouraged to involve local communities, user organizations, women and non-governmental organizations in the planning and decision-making procedures. The need for capacity-building programmes through training and education at the community level, aimed at empowering communities and, in particular, women, was emphasized.

47. The Conference also recommended that Governments develop detailed guidelines for investments in order to rationalize resource generation and use. Such guidelines need to be developed in the context of the formulation of policies and measures aimed at the goal of providing water and sanitation services to all. Such guidelines need to consider issues related to tariffs, subsidies, the need for financial autonomy and accountability of utilities, conditions for the effective participation of the private sector in the provision of water and sanitation services to wealthy and poor communities, and the nature of measures to be taken in fostering the development of community organizations for the operation and management of systems in peri-urban and rural areas. The Conference also recommended that Governments explore and develop new, innovative financing mechanisms, including private funding and the harnessing of local resources to the maximum extent possible. With regard to the involvement of communities in the financing and management of services, the Conference recommended to Governments that they stimulate such approaches through mechanisms for access to credit, land distribution and security of tenure.

48. The importance of reliable information at the national level concerning various aspects of water supply and sanitation has been stressed since the United Nations Water Conference in 1977. In this regard, the Ministerial Conference reiterated the importance of this question by recommending to Governments that they establish, where it does not yet exist, a nationwide drinking water and environmental sanitation monitoring system. To date, the weakness in information management systems remains a major constraint in all but a few countries. The availability and the proper management of information need to be considered as essential components of national efforts in strategies, policies and programmes for the provision of service to all. Much more needs to be done in this regard, in terms of the quality, reliability, timeliness, level of detail and geographical coverage of data. Efforts are also needed to expand databases in order to include information on gender issues, and on use, as well as on the efficiency and cost of delivery systems. Institutional capacities for data collection and management at the community, district, regional and national levels need to be strengthened. Attention needs to be given to the allocation of sufficient financial resources to this end.

49. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its second session, requested countries, with the assistance of international organizations, to include in their 1997 national reports a specific section on national goals and strategies in the field of drinking water and environmental sanitation, including, as appropriate, target dates, with a view to the implementation of the Action Programme. 5/ The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme plays a central role in the monitoring of national efforts for the purpose of international assessments of progress concerning water supply and sanitation. As noted by the Ministerial Conference, there is a need for Governments to make full use of the Joint Monitoring Programme. Cooperation between Governments and this Programme needs to be intensified in order to increase its access to more reliable and detailed information and to expand the number of countries, including countries with economies in transition, contributing to the Programme's database.

50. National authorities, regional, bilateral and international cooperation organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, would need to devote greater attention to this issue.

51. The Ministerial Conference made a number of recommendations concerning international support. They deal with capacity-building and the support needed by Governments in developing countries concerning the formulation of national strategies, and support to Governments regarding the role of communities and stakeholders. As to the latter issue, the Conference called for the development of programmes for the exchange of information and experience, particularly concerning training, education, research and technology and on modalities of project design and implementation. It also called for external agencies to support public education and capacity-building programmes, since the value of developing and implementing school curricula concerning hygiene, the health benefits of safe water and sanitation, as well as the efficient use and conservation of water resources, have not been fully appreciated. The Conference also recommended that future international conferences address relevant water resources development and management issues, and, in particular, those related to water supply and environmental sanitation.

52. With regard to the financial resources required to provide suitable water and sanitation services worldwide, the Conference noted that, in order to prevent a water crisis, there is an urgent need to mobilize, within the framework established by chapter 33 of Agenda 21, adequate financial resources, through using all available sources and mechanisms and maximizing the availability and smooth flow of additional resources to execute the Action Programme.

53. With regard to issues requiring the attention of the international community, it is clear that priority needs to be given to the African region. Action within the United Nations system of organizations in this regard is taking place within the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Working Group on the Availability and Management of Water in Africa, under the leadership of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Environment Programme; within the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources; and within the Africa 2000 Programme of WHO.

54. Urgent attention by the international community is equally required to achieve significant progress with regard to sanitation in urban and rural areas. Special attention needs to be given to the problems confronting large and rapidly growing urban concentrations. Effective measures need to be formulated and implemented in terms of bringing about a flow of financial resources commensurate with the severity of the problem, and of the necessary institutional support and capacity-building, if health and environmental disasters are to be avoided in the future.

Notes

1/ Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12), chap. I.

2/ Ismail Serageldin, Water Supply, Sanitation, and Environmental Sustainability: The Financing Challenge (Washington, D.C., World Bank, November 1994), p. 15.

3/ Ibid.

4/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

5/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 13 (E/1994/33/Rev.1), chap. I, para. 145.